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United States Department of Agriculture,

BUREAU OF PLANT INDUSTRY,

Farmers' Cooperative Demonstration Work,

WASHINGTON, D. C.

FAMILIAR TALKS ON FARMING.

DIVERSIFICATION.

On the first of June I found time to make another call on Uncle John. He expected me and had invited about twenty neighboring farmers to be present. As I approached the house I noticed some signs of improvement; the front fence was repaired, a few rose bushes had been set out, and a new walk made. Within, the farmers appeared to be very much interested about something.

As I entered the door Uncle John rose with considerable dignity and said: "I mentioned to my neighbors some of the things we discussed when you were here last and they were so interested they asked the privilege of being present when you came again. I sent word this morning; they came early and we concluded to organize a club to talk about our farms. They appointed me chairman. It is time for the meeting to commence. You can talk on any subject you please."

"Uncle John," I replied, "what were you all discussing so earnestly when I came up to the door?"

"Why, you see," remarked Uncle John, "there was a dressed-up fellow around here calling agricultural meetings and we went out to hear him. He pitched into the cotton farmers generally and told us we ought to diversify, that our lands were just right for truck farming, and that there was big money in it.

"He told about a farmer in Texas by the name of Nye who got \$5,000 worth of onions off of 7 acres, and another man at Victoria, Tex., who made \$700 an acre out of celery, and a string of farmers somewhere else that made piles of money out of Irish potatoes, cabbages, melons, tomatoes, and beans. Such a powerful lot of figures made us sort of uneasy. Do you believe he told the truth?"

"Yes," I replied, "he told you the truth. I know Mr. Nye, and I know the celery gardener at Victoria, and I know many of the others; but he did not tell you the whole truth. He did not tell you that Mr. Nye used sixty loads of well-rotted cow-pen manure per acre under his first crop, and he did not tell you of the thousands who lost all they had in trying to make truck for market."

“What your land is adapted to raise is about the smallest item in profitable farming. The deep, black, sandy loam soils of the South are well adapted to raising pineapples, bananas, and oranges. There is money in raising them; why not go into the business? The climate prevents. It is too cold. If you could raise them they would not be as sweet as if grown in the Tropics. Climate is a great factor. Plants get from six to twenty-five times as much food from the air as from the soil. Grass derives about $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent from the soil, exclusive of water; corn, $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent; and sugar cane, less than 1 per cent.

“Truck is bulky and perishable. After it is raised, profits depend upon transportation, the markets, and the expenses of selling—all of them mighty uncertain. In the Gulf States you are from a thousand to fifteen hundred miles from your market. Eventually vegetables from the West Indies and tropical Florida will go into your markets weeks before your vegetables are ready, and prices will drop to cost or below. Later, northern gardeners close to the cities will take the markets. The climate, the transportation, and the profits of the commission men are against you. You are just between the early and the late producers. It is a gamble, and you will win just enough to make you put up all you have and lose.

“The last of May of this year I saw acres of fine cabbages in North Carolina plowed under because they would not pay the cost of transportation.

“The successful production of truck depends upon several things. You should have rich sandy loam land, have the teams and tools to give deep and thorough tillage, fill the soil with well-rotted stable manure, have some experience, and your farm should not be more than 3 miles from your shipping place. You reside from 5 to 20 miles from your nearest station. Probably that man was an agent of some railroad and wanted to increase the freights. Vegetables are great on increasing freights, for they are nearly all water—80 to 90 per cent—and it does seem a waste to haul water 1,500 miles. It was rather cool of that agent to ask you to raise water, done up in cabbages, melons, and tomatoes, and haul it an average of 10 miles, and ship it 1,500 miles so as to make freights.”

“You don’t appear to be in favor of diversification,” said Jim Brown. Brown has worked hard all his life and has 80 acres of rather poor land half paid for. He has always been an enthusiast on diversification. He is now thinking of moving west so as to diversify. This moving diversification is a poor kind.

“On the contrary,” I replied, “I am a great believer in diversification that is safe and always helpful. I will outline what I mean.

“The first step in diversification is to diversify from poor crops to good crops; from a promise to a performance; from a tenant farmer to an owner of the soil. Stand for something and make good.

“The second step is to produce upon your farm all that is required for the family and domestic animals on the farm. Supply your family market before you go into the business of raising foods or fruits for Chicago or New York; raise a variety and a plenty.

“The third step is to increase the number of good mares and cattle and hogs on the farm if you have unused lands, and eliminate the unprofitable.

“The fourth is to have plenty of good pasture—not a weed or brier in it—just choice grasses; have a good meadow; cut and cure enough excellent hay. If you have no meadow put up plenty of pea-vine and sorghum hay. Fill all the cornfields with cowpeas and have some fields of clear cowpeas and of peanuts. When the corn has been gathered in August you can turn hogs, cattle, horses, and mules into the cornfields and be sure that the runtiest pig and the poorest mule will be rolling fat by winter. In the fall plant plenty of rape, crimson clover, oats, and vetch for a cover crop and for winter pasture.

“Plant more than the stock can eat. It would not bankrupt you if some oats went to seed and you harvested them. Fence tight a good tract of oak woodland and let the stock have free range. Give some additional feed and let the stock come into the spring in excellent condition.

“The thrifty farmer should always have something to sell—a few good colts and steers, or a milch cow, or some hogs. Every time he goes to town the wagon should carry some fruit, or vegetables, or butter, or eggs, or poultry, and on its return it should not be loaded with canned vegetables, desiccated fruits, preserved meats, or tinned milk. The wagon that goes to town empty and returns loaded with foods the farmer could produce at home is owned by a man who has but one suspender and wears a crownless hat. Enough of the odds and ends should be sold to pay the running expenses of the farm, and the cotton crop should be a clear bankable gain. Cotton is the greatest cash crop in the world.”

Here Ben Williams interrupted. “I am told,” said he, “that I have some fine land for long-staple cotton and I am thinking of planting some.”

“You will make a great mistake,” I replied. “There is no long-staple cotton raised in your neighborhood. Long-staple cottons are generally small yielders and you will not raise enough to make a market. You will probably get no more per pound than your neighbors and will raise less cotton per acre. As a rule the farmers in a township had better raise the same variety of cotton as far as practicable, if a good one, for it will bring more in the markets.

“A case in point is this: The Triumph is an early, large-boll, prolific cotton, of medium staple, and exceedingly well adapted to most southern conditions. It grades considerably above average cotton and

when grown where the general average of cotton is of good type and quality it brings 2 cents a pound more than when grown where the average cotton is short staple or low grade. That is, cotton grades—a good deal like men—according to the company it keeps. The average cotton is a degenerate mongrel. There are only a few types that ought to be produced for a standard crop in the United States. If these were generally raised and carefully picked and baled throughout an entire county, the farmers in that county would get an average of 2 cents a pound more than they now receive. The same holds true of long-staple cotton. Where only one farmer plants it he can not get the price he ought to have.

“I have tried to make clear that advising a farmer about his crop from a single standpoint is rank folly. The climate, the season, the preparation of the land and its cultivation, the variety, the markets, and even what the neighbors raise are important parts of the problem. Over and above all these is the farmer.

“When I go around advising people about growing cotton, I always put my tester into the man. There is more in the man than in the land. A first-class man will make almost any soil productive. A low-grade man will raise a low grade of cotton on the finest delta lands of America.”

S. A. KNAPP,
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Approved:

B. T. GALLOWAY,
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